

another challenge to determine just how far the normative philosophical arguments can be applied to cinema, as well as just how much cinema can allow us to enter into philosophical dialogue. So, this work is not simply a consideration of Terrence Malick, but also blazes an interesting trail in looking at the interconnectivity of film and philosophy—our mother and father, who wrestle within us.

### Note

<sup>1</sup> Though he never attained his PhD, Malick did have a short-lived career of teaching philosophy as a lecturer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1968, just before publishing his translation of Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons (Vom Wesen des Grundes)* in 1969.

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Jason Horsley, *The Secret Life of Movies: Schizophrenic and Shamanic Journeys in American Cinema* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), viii + 291 pp., \$39.95 (paperback).

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Cinema techniques have long been associated with dreams (Rascaroli 2002). Compression and expansion of time and abrupt scenic transitions through flashbacks and flash-forwards, the deft use of dissolves and the natural perspective of the “subjective camera” come immediately to mind. Enhanced special effects and uncanny but dimly familiar plots also give certain movies a dreamlike aura. Nonetheless, film cannot quite mimic the startling intensity and vivid realism of certain dream states because the contemporary moviegoer usually does not experience the total immersion of the dreamer in their dream. But what if some movies—apart from their entertainment value and archetypal plots—are actually metaphors for the repressed traumas of the social unconscious, a kind of lucid dreaming with soundtracks and production credits? Walter Benjamin noted as much in his famous Artwork essay, written shortly after the appearance of commercial talkies in the 1920s. He observed of cinema that “It is through the camera that we first discover the optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis” (Benjamin [1936] 2002: 117).<sup>1</sup>

Jason Horsley's intriguing account of modern American film suggests this possibility, and much more besides. The Freudian and Jungian interpretive framework he uses seems to emerge from the paranoid, schizophrenic penumbra of post-war American life he tracks in many of its cultural artifacts. Cinema, in this reading, is an objective correlate of hidden psychological tensions and diffuse social pathologies; in fact, says Horsley, it is “the most schizoid art



form,” and thus a singular gauge of the myths we tell ourselves about the blurring between perception and reality (or realities) that haunt our collective psyche. By inhabiting a split consciousness and occupying time outside of linear chronology, particular movies and their directors offer a shamanic journey from estrangement and loss of identity to psychic integration.

Thus, as both art and entertainment, movies can illuminate hidden connections or splits among different realms, including sacred/profane, humans/nature or humans/technology, myth/history, self/other, waking/dreaming, and madness/sanity. Horsley views film noir paranoia as a natural precursor to the heightened schizophrenia of more recent American films, offering the viewer a temporary if illusory escape from the intolerable fate of their schizoid protagonists. At the same time, the vicarious experience of watching certain movies helps viewers cope with their own alienation, fragmentation, and trauma. The secret life of movies amounts, in part, to therapeutic voyeurism:

*Movies are a means for people who are alienated from all three areas of experience—from the religious, the shamanistic, and the schizophrenic—to pursue a meaningful relationship with their unconscious, while remaining a functional part of society. They act as modern, popular myths, not so much to live by as to escape into. (6)*

Horsley is surely right to view schizophrenia as a recurring theme in American culture. William James' ([1902] 1987) description of disunity in the “psychopathic temperament” at the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, foreshadows the alarming role of simulacra in *The Matrix* at century's end.<sup>2</sup> But schizophrenia is only part of the story. What Horsley offers is an idiosyncratic mashup of movie history consisting of cultural critique, classic psychoanalysis, and dollops of edgy film criticism (“what had promised to be a lacerating sex comedy turns into cotton candy” or “crude and manipulative as it is,” etc.) Specifically, he wants to show how certain films provide an authentic reflection of schizoid themes and characters while avoiding formulaic endings or sly evasions. But this manic, pin-ball approach occasionally goes astray. For instance, in analyzing a scene from *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) in which the Jack Nicholson character (Robert Dupea) verbally attacks an intellectual poseur, Robert is actually defending his girlfriend Rayette rather than Catherine, his brother's fiancée, who had fled the scene moments before after being brutalized by the same mannish caricature.<sup>3</sup> But in true schizoid fashion, Robert then chases after Catherine to comfort her. Again, in referencing *The Usual Suspects* (1995) Horsley ascribes a statement about disbelief in God to the character named Keaton (not “Keating”) when in fact it is arch criminal Keyser Söze, masquerading as the cripple “Verbal” Kint, who attributes this statement to Keaton—whom he has previously murdered—before

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expressing his own belief in God by way of ironic self-aggrandizement.<sup>4</sup> Such details matter to certain movie fans.

The point of view on schizophrenia in American cinema shifts throughout the book. Sometimes the focus is on actors and directors. At other times his analysis of particular films or film characters, or of popular culture, yields curious insights. Deciphering these “occult” texts for schizoid themes occasionally results in strained analogies. Thus, Horsley calls the original cartoon version of Batman “the archetypal schizophrenic of the 20th century” (147), while the deranged criminal Frank Booth in *Blue Velvet* (1986) qualifies as the Great American Psychopath, a sort of Everyman schizoid who shows us what “the psychopath has been up to all along” (161). So far, so good. But things get a bit weird when a few pages later he likens sociopath Frank Booth to slacker Murray Burns in *A Thousand Clowns* (1965) simply because both reject conformity or when he compares Apache warriors to Adolf Hitler because they evidently feared ridicule. As things turned out, fear of ridicule was probably the least of their collective worries.

Odder still is Horsley’s depiction of the “enlightened psychopath,” or the individual who has “transcended their demons” to become “someone who is ‘useful’ (a positive, creative, sustaining influence) to both himself and society” (168). Horsley thinks this disturbing social type is more widespread than we suppose (think Tom Stall in *A History of Violence*) because he believes we live in a culture “precariously teetering on the brink of madness and ruin, in which the most precious commodity is also the most uncertain—that of peace of mind” (194). As noted, escapist movies exploit anxiety and provide cathartic entertainment by safely reflecting the latent schizophrenia in the social order itself. What is not so clear is whether or to what extent movies imitate life (or the reverse). Horsley’s treatment strategically blurs this distinction. If schizoid movies and the collective psyche somehow reflect each other, perhaps it is in funhouse distortion mirrors lit by strobe lights. Nonetheless, the appearance/reality puzzle has a long pedigree (apart from the possibility of alternative universes). Movies like *The Matrix* and *Fight Club* are master classes in schizoid complexity partly because they represent modernist spins on René Descartes’ “evil demon” hypothesis.<sup>5</sup> This possibility is not necessarily unendurable, notes Horsley, since “Every conspiracy has an agenda that is hidden, even from its leading perpetrators, who, in turn, are confounded by their own ‘predilections’ for darkness” (220).

Schizophrenia defined as a psychic split or the split between perception and reality allows Horsley to trace this syndrome across major movie genres, from the western and melodrama to horror, science fiction, supernatural mystery, and what he calls “schizo comedies.” With repetition, though, the schizophrenia metaphor inevitably becomes shopworn and formulaic even as it illuminates: “The call of the wild is the call of the id, the great wilderness of

the unconscious that lies behind and underneath the flimsy constructs of culture and 'identity'" (276). In contrast, his opening pages on the "occult text" in *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* are superb.

Horsley's most persuasive writing focuses on films combining formal merit with plots and characters that clearly illustrate or anticipate schizoid themes. Prominent among these is *The Searchers* (1956) and Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). The Ethan Edwards character in *Searchers* is the archetypal frontier individualist who exists on the margins in ambivalent isolation. His Civil War veteran status, his capacity for violence, and his repressed sexuality foreshadow Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (1976). He explodes into action after his brother's family is slaughtered by a group of Comanche led by Scar, who abducts Ethan's teen-aged niece Debbie for his concubine. Horsley writes convincingly about Edwards's schizoid mind-set and the ensuing drama that culminates in a final scene of tragic grace, as he wanders off the homestead alone into the desolate badlands. In a curious parallel, Ethan Edwards's choice to rescue rather than kill his "polluted" niece has echoes in Travis Bickle's apocalyptic liberation of adolescent runaway Iris from a life of prostitution in *Taxi Driver*. According to Horsley, these movie protagonists represent the psychopathic hero's cathartic journey to psychic integration by way of retributive violence. This could just as easily be Odysseus, settling accounts at home in Ithaca after a long, eventful absence.

An altogether different schizoid figure is Scottie Ferguson, the retired detective in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. A convoluted plot rooted in layers of deception and self-deception, marital betrayal, and romantic projection, *Vertigo* is—on the surface—a psychological thriller wrapped in a murder mystery. Horsley's reading of the "occult" text in *Vertigo* reveals Hitchcock's adroit use of darker psychological material. Scottie is lost in an unconscious conflict in which Eros and the death drive have gone haywire in the course of his doomed search for an illusory soulmate ("anima"). Scottie's fragile psychological state (a form of vertigo) is harnessed to a murder scheme involving switched identities and crass opportunism. The symmetry between ordinary thriller and schizoid parable is further enhanced by innovative cinematography and the Bernard Herrmann soundtrack. The lack of resolution for the central character in *Vertigo* hints at realism. As Horsley writes:

*Scottie is not an easy protagonist to identify with, not because he is so far from us but because he is so far from how we want to see ourselves. If Scottie Ferguson is the first fully realistic movie hero in modern American cinema, it is because he is the first unmistakably schizophrenic personality to function as the protagonist in an otherwise "standard" genre movie. (73)*

In the end Scottie is left standing frozen on the ledge at the top of the Mission San Juan Bautista bell tower, staring into space after the Kim Novak character

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plunges to her death, the deafening bells behind him tolling the end of his quest for love and redemption.

Although the filmography in this book covers an impressive array of source material Horsley's focus on schizophrenia in modern American cinema is oddly biased, and the reason for this is not clear. Where are movies featuring female schizophrenics or schizoid themes, or the broader inclusion of female sociopaths in post-war American cinema? The book's argument might have been enriched by a chapter on classics like *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), *Possessed* (1947), *The Snake Pit* (1948), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Three Faces of Eve* (1957), and *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959). Noteworthy schizoid melodramas from the same period also include *Bigger Than Life* (1956), *Reflections in a Golden Eye* (1967), the more recent *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), and the biopic *A Beautiful Mind* (2001). *The Machinist* (2004), a curiously neglected dramatization of schizoid repression, might have inflected his insights as well. And this leaves out Bette Davis's gothic psychodramas.

Horsley would no doubt reply that he wrote about films, actors, or directors that best illustrated his thesis or that held his interest for one reason or another. Editorial considerations might have entered the picture as well. His observations on early Roman Polanski, certain Tim Burton films, and Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* certainly make for worthwhile reading, though David Lynch's disturbing dream factory might have gotten more space. Plus, of all the provocative female characters in American film, the femme fatale and the rebel have absorbed a significant amount of critical attention, possibly to the detriment of other interpretive options. Obviously, the schizophrenic, paranoid journey in American film is not gendered; everyone is welcome to get on board. This book would be a good supplementary text for film and cultural studies classes or courses in film history and film criticism.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" Benjamin goes on to say that "Moreover, these two types of unconscious are intimately linked. For in most cases the diverse aspects of reality captured by the film camera lie outside only the *normal* spectrum of sense impressions. Many of the deformations and stereotypes, transformations and catastrophes which can assail the optical world in films afflict the actual world in psychoses, hallucinations, and dreams. Thanks to the camera, therefore, the individual perceptions of the psychotic or the dreamer can be appropriated by collective perception" Benjamin ([1936] 2002: 117–118).

<sup>2</sup> See James ([1902] 1987). In the section of this work called "The Divided Self, and the Process of Its Unification," James talks about psychopaths in terms of their "heterogeneous personality." The schizoid sensibility was in the air when this work was originally published. Rimbaud's famous 1871 "seer" letter, with its assertion that "I is someone else" and call for the "logical derangement of all the senses" announces a poetics of schizophrenia. See Rimbaud ([1871] 2003: 30–39). Sigmund Freud's ([1871] 2003: 233–244) account of an odd

schizoid episode he had while on vacation in Greece could be a scene from many of the movies discussed by Horsley.

<sup>3</sup> Bob Rafelson, *Five Easy Pieces*, chapter 25, "Cold & Objective," DVD (Columbia Pictures).

<sup>4</sup> Bryan Singer, *The Usual Suspects*, chapter 22, "One Day in Turkey," Blu-ray ed. (MGM).

<sup>5</sup> René Descartes begins his famous *Meditations* ([1641] 2008: 16) on the possibility—soon rejected—that "some evil spirit, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me." Descartes contextualizes his "deceiver hypothesis" on pages 13–24 of this edition. *The Matrix* (1999) explicitly references Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* ([1981] 1994), a key text on the historical dimensions of simulated reality. Baudrillard suggests that elements in Descartes' "deceiver hypothesis" have been realized (and secularized) in the modern world.

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When I was a young baseball fan, I spent a good amount of time poring over the annual Bill James Baseball Handbooks, a set of statistical analyses of almost all of the important factors that allow baseball teams to win games. The best thing about the abstracts was the way in which an analysis would often reveal a new question, which was often answered in another analysis. The thing that makes this all possible is that the history of baseball is in large part an enormous series of thousands of repeated, hierarchically organized quantifiable events. A pitch is a strike or a ball, and there are up to three of the former, and four of the latter. The series of pitches makes up an at-bat, which results in one of several well-defined outcomes, and the at-bats are neatly packed into innings that are neatly packed into games. Accordingly, one can ask whether the outcome of a broad range of easily measured events are associated with each other, and with easily measured outcomes.

This kind of statistical analysis is, of course, useful in a wide range of domains, especially where a large number of quantifiable events are repeated with quantifiable results. In his book, *Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics*, Dean Keith Simonton reviews an extensive set of statistical analyses of movies. In particular, most of the analyses focus first on validating measures of the quality of films—including awards, critical response, audience ratings, and box-office success—and then on the degree to which various factors are interrelated and can predict important outcomes. Predictive factors are primarily organized around the professions contributing to film production, and some of these are given an analysis in their own right (for example several analyses explore the career trajectories of directors and male vs. female actors). Much of the work described comes from Simonton's own publications, but at least some are analyses done by other researchers. The book is interesting, and it reaches conclusions that may be helpful to individuals ranging from film producers to academics interested in a range of topics from box office success to music to sexism. However, a key question is